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AUTHOR	Olivas, Margarita Refugia
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ABSTRACT

Research on U.S. "Greek" sororities has typically addressed issues dealing with White women in higher education. In contrast, this case study sought to identify the cultural behaviors and group norms that serve to enhance academic achievement and reinforce personal growth among members of a Latina sorority. In fall 1993, interviews were conducted with 12 members of a Latina sorority at a northwestern university. Their testimonies reveal that the reasons for joining this Latina sorority are in profound contrast to those given by White women who join sororities. Moreover, the members view the organization as a means for preserving or regaining an individual, yet collective, ethnic identity. Additionally, findings indicate that the formation of this Latina sorority was a response to institutionalized racism; feelings of isolation and alienation; needs for emotional, psychological, and social support; and a need to belong to a family. Cultural themes that emerged from the data relate to family, sisterhood, gender role expectations, community, and respect (for oneself and others). Latina sororities such as this one provide a refuge in an often hostile environment, fulfill needs not met by family or the academic world, and help students to empower themselves. Contains 70 references. (Author/SV)

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ED 407 194

Latina Sororities and Higher Education: The Ties That Bind

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By
Margarita Refugia Olivas

Paper presented at the AESA Convention
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ABSTRACT

Research of US Greek sororities have typically addressed issues dealing with White women in higher education. In contrast, this study seeks to identify the cultural behaviors and group norms that serve to enhance academic achievement and to reinforce personal growth among members of a Greek Latina Sorority. Twelve interviews were conducted in Fall of 1993 at a US Northwestern University. Throughout this paper, the testimonies of the participants reveal that the reasons for joining this Latina sorority are in profound contrast to those given by white women for joining white sororities. Moreover, testimonies reflect that members view the organization as a means for preserving or regaining an individual, yet collective ethnic identity. Additionally, findings indicate that the formation of this Latina sorority was also a response to institutionalized racism, feelings of isolation and alienation, a need for emotional, psychological, and social support, and a need to belong to a family. Cultural themes that emerged from the data include *familia* (family), sisterhood, gender role expectations, community; and *respeto* (respect).

Key Words/Topics: Sorority; Greek organizations; sisterhood; ethnic identity; ethnic minority; identification and community; group identity formation; drop out prevention; Latina gender roles; Latino culture; familism; Institutional racism; Latina in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

This case study examines a Latina Greek sorority located at a Northwestern US public university. Only 15 percent of the student population is of ethnic minority status. At the time of the sorority's formation, only five percent of the students were ethnic minority. Members of this sorority self-identify as being Latinas from both North and South America, for example Mexican-Americans, Mexicans, Costa Ricans, Puerto Ricans, etc. There were two main questions that directed this study. The first was, "What role does identity play in the formation of Latina sororities?" The second was, "Does participation in this sorority impact student retention?" Additionally, I examine the characteristics of this sorority for similarities and differences with Anglo (white) sororities, and to a lesser degree with African-American (Black) sororities.

As a group, undergraduate Latino student drop out rates indicate that as many as 80% leave their institutions before acquiring a degree (Eagle & Carroll, 1988; Solberg, Valdez, & Villarreal, 1994), and that college minority enrollment rates have been slowly declining since the mid 1980's (Carter & Wilson, 1991; Chahin, 1993; Hurtado, 1993; Orfield, 1991; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). This is particularly true for Latinas who "are among the most poorly educated women in our society" (Gandara, 1982, p. 167) and who struggle with the contradictions that exist between attempts at acquiring higher education and their traditional cultural practices.

A review of the literature indicates Chicana undergraduates experience significantly more stress than their male counterparts (Chacon, Cohen, & Strover, 1986; Mendoza, 1981; Munoz, 1986) and greater stress levels than Anglo men (Munoz, 1986; Munoz & Garcia-Bahne, 1978). One reason for higher levels of stress among these Latina sorority members is that they have chosen to attend college which defies traditional gender roles (Cardoza, 1991; Keefe, Padilla, & Carlos, 1978; Moore, 1970; Nieves-Squires, 1991). Generally speaking, Latina women marry and usually have children by the time they reach 20 years of age (Grebler, Moore, Guzman, 1970). Another reason for high stress levels among this group of women is related to Latino conservative

notions regarding sexuality (Baird, 1993), which serve to restrict and limit social interactions. As will be shown, these women are struggling to retain aspects of traditional gender roles, while at the same time resisting others. Thus, the stress levels associated with the insecurity Latinas feel about their place in college, is compounded by family resistance to changing gender roles, as well as their own and collective evolving cultural identities.

Other factors that caused excessive stress for these Latinas are in-line with research of women in higher education, such as perceived discrimination (Hurtado, 1992, Loo and Rolison, 1986; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993) and racial tension on campus (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado, 1994; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993); a continuing sense of responsibility to their families (Gandara, 1982) including financial (Nieves-Squires, 1991; Munoz, 1986, Vasques, 1982); lack of familial financial support (Chacon, Cohen, strover, 1986; Mendoza, P. 1981; Rodriguez, 1986; 1993; Smedley, Myers, Harrell, 1993; Vasquez, 1982; Quintana, Vogel, Ybarra, 1991); and working while taking a full load of classes (Munoz, 1986). Anglo dominated universities can be alienating places (Cardoza, 1991; Clark, Windley, Jones, & Ellis, 1986; Munoz, 1986; Smedley, Myers, Harrell, 1993; Peterson, Altbach, Skinner, & Trainor, 1976), where "many attitudes and values of the university culture are at odds with the character of Hispanic interpersonal relationships, forms of communication, and sex-role expectations" (Nieves-Squires, 1991). Research also shows that Latinas tend to feel more socially alienated in university settings than do Latinos (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990), and that feelings of alienation lower levels of emotional adjustment (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996).

In the case study presented here, I found that these young Latinas formed their sorority not only to preserve or regain cultural values, but also as a means of collectively working to "buffer stress" (Blythe, 1983; Sabogal, Marin, & Otero-Sabogal, 1987), while actively seeking college degrees. In exploring the history and political rhetoric of Latinos since the civil rights movement, I concluded that the development of this organization reflects the growing sentiments of the US

Latinos' desires to retain their cultural identity while operating within dominant society. Additionally, their insistence on the metaphor of the US being a salad bowl versus a melting pot reflects the resistance to assimilation that works toward striping ethnic minorities of their ethnic consciousness.

Hence, this sorority has provided these young Latina women a cultural, academic, and social support system that is crucial to their college adjustment. Support for the idea that social support systems "active and buffer one from the potentially debilitating effects of stress" were reported in a study conducted by Solberg, Valdez, and Villarreal (1994, p. 231-232). The idea that Latina sororities are a form of cultural and social support that allows for the integration of Latina youths in higher education is exciting. As Oliver, Rodriguez, and Mickelson (1985) have indicated "school integration at the secondary level is clearly important . . . this is not only because it may help prepare students better in traditional skills, but because it will allow exposure to cultural capital that will help the student achieve in the university" (p. 18). Another significant factor related to the development of such sororities is that Latinas themselves are becoming active agents in acquiring their education.

THE GREEK SYSTEM AND LATINA SORORITY DEVELOPMENT

One can speculate that in prehistoric times and through subsistence agriculture, physiological needs and protection constituted and enhanced group membership and cohesiveness among nomadic groups. The fulfillment of some of the lesser, though very important, human needs discussed by Maslow (1986) described as love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization, have played a significant role in membership cohesiveness.

Today the fulfillment of physiological and psychological are still significant reasons for joining groups or organizations (Beebe & Masterson, 1986, p. 39-40), with the driving force behind group affiliation being group identification. Historically, one's need for identification has been linked to various organizations. Academia is not an exception. This has been particularly the

case over the last two hundred years of higher education where traditional white and Black Greek fraternities and sororities have equally, but separately flourished.

The first US Greek-letter fraternity, Phi Beta Kappa, was established on December 5, 1776 at the college of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This organization began as an underground organization whose goal was to assist young white men in achieving their academic goals. However, today this fraternity is considered to be one of most prestigious Greek organizations. Today there are 53 Greek-letter Fraternities under the umbrella of the National Interfraternity Conference and are well established nationally and internationally. Phi Beta Kappa itself consists of 180 chapters with 190,000 members both in the US and Canada (Internet fraternity homepage).

With the advent of women entering higher education, came the formation of the first white sorority, Alpha Delta Pi. As was the case with Phi Beta Kappa, this sorority traces its roots to a secret organization called the Adelphean Society, founded in 1851 at Wesleyan Female College in Macon, Georgia. The name of the organization was changed to Alpha Delta Phi in 1904 when it became officially recognized as a national sorority. Due to the confusion with a fraternity holding the same Greek-letters, the sorority changed its name to Alpha Delta Pi in 1913. The philosophies of early sororities reflect the goal of academic achievement for the advancement of women. Currently, there are 26 different organizations under the umbrella of the National Panhellenic Conference. Alpa Delta Pi consists of 135 chapters with members both in the US and Canada (Internet sorority homepage).

Considering these organizations have been operating for 200 and nearly 150 years, it should come to no one's surprise that traditional white Greek organizations are deeply rooted in conservative Euro-American philosophical beliefs and cultural norms that allow for subtle institutionalized practices that limits the heterogeneity of fraternities and sororities (Peterson, Altbach, Skinner, & Trainor, 1976; Risman, 1982). Sorority homogeneity of Greek systems is

particularly perpetuated through the practice of rush (Mongell & Roth, 1991; Peterson, Altbach, Skinner, & Trainor, 1976). Rush is the process utilized by Greek sororities to select new membership. Those participating in rush usually attend a series of parties where they are engaged in informal interviews and selected as potential members. As is the case with most deeply rooted institutionalized practices, rush has eluded any change since 1928 (Mongell & Roth, 1991).

Unsurprisingly, the cultural practice of rush has served to unite white women as unique individuals within a broader segregated community (the Greek system), which in itself constitutes groups of women who tend to be relatively homogenous (Cohen, 1980; Cohen, 1982; Lord, 1987; Peterson, Altbach, Skinner, & Trainor, 1976). For example, in a study conducted in 1971 by Peterson, Altbach, Skinner & Trainor, it was found that the Greek system of the University of Wisconsin - Madison "has attracted a highly affluent group of people, with a high social class and religious homogeneity. There were among our respondents only one Jew and apparently no members of racial minority groups" (p. 112). Other studies revealed that rules and requirement of many sorority houses were not sensitive nor conducive to individual differences, but instead demanded "social conformity" (Rose & Elton, 1971).

Hence, recruitment of new membership into traditionally white sororities are subtle forms of racism, which is ". . . acted-out, behaved--not expressed in language. And fraternities are a training ground for that kind of elite racial practice" (Lord, 1987). Studies have shown that members of white fraternities and sororities are more racist than those who were not affiliated with the Greek system (Muir, 1991). According Schmitz and Forbes (1994), the in-house culture of Greek fraternities and sororities perpetuates racism, particularly in those students who are prejudice to begin with (Muir, 1991). Similarly, Morris (1991) found that

> Greek housing students showed greater acceptance of country clubs that exclude ethnic minorities, less interest in associating with those from different cultural racial backgrounds, greater opposition to interracial marriages, and less concern about racial prejudices and the rise of hate groups (p. 501).

These findings serve to reinforce the notion of group identification being exclusionary to those who are ethnically, culturally, politically, and socially different from the recruiting sorority.

Similar to the development of the traditional white Greek system was the establishment of Black Greeks. Beginning in the early 1900's Blacks in the US who had been denied access to education for hundreds of years began attending higher education via Black colleges. On December 4, 1906 the first Black fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha, was established at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. Its goal was "to maintain close association and unified support among black students and encourage good character, sound scholarship and service" (Hackett, 1985 p. 44).

As was the case with educated white women following in the footsteps of educated white men, educated Black women followed the lead of educated Black men and established their first sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha on January 15, 1908 at Howard University, Washington, DC It's main function was to serve as an "instrument for promoting friendship and scholarship" (Hackett, 1985, p. 45).

Delta Sigma Theta followed suite in 1913 and its members motivations stemmed from concern with "social welfare, academic excellence, and cultural enrichment." A summit organized in 1981 resulted in the adoption of several action steps for improving the political and economic plight of Black women such as

> setting up a black women's job network to share information about career opportunities. Publishing a minority women's business director. Setting up a black women's capital investment fund. Pooling the funds of individual black women to make short-term investments in money market funds. . . . Encouraging black women to run for political office and supporting their efforts with time and money. Exploring possibilities of setting up a lobbying office in Washington to focus on women's issues . . . (p. 94)

Black Greek organizations now total an explosive 4,500 chapters over 1200 college campuses. In addition, they have "initiated into membership nearly a million of the nation's best and brightest Black Americans" (Whipple, Baier & Grady, 1991, p. 140).

In line with traditionally white fraternities and sororities, Black Greek organizations have been historically exclusionary. However, their exclusionary practices stem more from a reaction to racism which leaves little choice as to group identification. Nevertheless, these fraternities and sororities are powerful social and political entities whose interests benefit those with whom they identify. William Domhoff, (1978) who examines power structures maintains that social clubs serve to preserve the status of the elite upper-class through networking and intermarriage among the rich. Additionally, he claims that "there is considerable overlap and interaction--in schools, clubs, resorts, and corporations--among the very wealthiest families and businesspeople in the largest cities all over the country, and they are the focal points of the national upper class" (p. 159).

On the other hand, nepotism has also benefited Black Greek organization alumni in the corporate and political arenas (Hackett, 1985). However, there is a "cap-off point" or glass ceiling that limits the advancement possible for most Black educated men and women (Domhoff, 1992). Nevertheless, nepotism and networking have contributed to the strides Blacks made in the United States in the development of a relatively large Black middle-class (Domhoff, 1992). These strides outweigh those made by other US minority groups, including Latinos and Native Americans who have resided in the southwest for hundreds of years.

Unlike Blacks who benefited from segregated Black college experiences, Spanish speaking people indigenous to the southwest have experienced limited success with higher education, as well as corporate America, particularly for Latina women. Though US Latinas(os) have historically been "integrated" into the dominate school system, the education they have received has not been equal (deMarris & LeCompte, 1995; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1993). Federal laws, state laws, and county educational regulations were passed which required active and aggressive measures in assimilating Spanish speaking people into "mainstream" society. However, in reality, Latino(a)s were, for the most part, traditionally separated from whites within the same

schools and at sometimes within classrooms (Griswold Del Castillo, 1979).

Attempts to assimilate Latinos(as) resulted in a loss of ethnic and cultural identity. This process of assimilation began for many, particularly those in California and other southwestern US states at birth. One tactic was the categorization of Latinos(as) by the US government that served "to situate them within the prevailing racial order . . . In the wake of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), Mexicans were defined as a 'white' population and accorded the political-legal status of 'free white persons" (Omi & Winant, 1991, p. 75). However, this did not guarantee them the status of equals among the hierarchy of race or class.

In reality, the practice of assimilating Latinas(os) served to isolate young Latina(o) children from their families and communities as they were placed in public schools for socialization (deMarris & LeCompte, 1995; Maher & Tetreault, 1994; Heath, 1983). Once enrolled, public schools actively worked to educate Latinos who would become middle-class clones of white Americans, particularly those whose who were light skinned descendants of Spanish conquistadors. For many other Latinos, particularly those who identified with their indigenous roots, the practice of denying them their identity established contradictory parameters and caused division among those willing to assimilate and those who wished to retain their cultural heritage, values, and norms.

The resistance to acculturation of Latinos into white society can be traced to the development of the first Latino Fraternity at Louisiana State University. Originally, this organization was named "Sociedad Hispano-Americana" and was founded in 1904. In 1912 this organization changed it's name to Sigma Iota. "'La Sigma' expanded very rapidly to Europe, Latin America, and the Continent United States" (Internet fraternity homepage). Then in 1931 *La Sigma* joined with Fi Lambda Alfa, a fraternity that originated in 1921 through the integration of three existing entities: "Union Hispano Americana," an organization of Latino men founded in 1898 at the Rensselar Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York; Pi Delta Fi, a Latino fraternity founded in

1916 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and Fi Lamdba Alfa, another Latino fraternity founded in 1919. Hence was born *La Union de Fi Iota Alfa*, the first national and international Latino Greek Fraternity system in the United States.

Historically speaking, two very important factors impacted the traditional Greek system in the twentieth century. The first was World War II, and the second was federal legislation passed after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's and 1970's.

After the second World War, universities and colleges put pressure on established Greek organizations to help provide student housing for the masses of veterans entering higher education through the GI Bill. As one might imagine, this created conflict among fraternity brothers who were traditionally middle-class and upper-class sons of prominent families. Black fraternities experienced similar conflicts. However, the experiences for Latino fraternities were quite different.

> From the breakout of World War II to 1952, Fi Iota Alfa's brothers declined drastically due to the reduction in enrollment of Latino Americanos in universities in the United States. By 1968, the only active undergraduate chapter of the fraternity existed at Rensselear Polytechnic Institute and by 1973 closed it's doors along with ten other fraternities nationwide" (Internet fraternity homepage).

This decline in fraternity membership was probably the result of the fact that the number of Latinos in higher education has been traditionally quite small. With the advent of war and without resources to fight the draft and stay in school, many young Latino men were drafted, particularly during the Vietnam War. By the early 1980's many Latinos who had been too young to be drafted during the Vietnam War began to enter college. The time was ripe for young men with raised ethnic consciousness to bond and foster like-minded affiliations. Hence, by 1984 this fraternity was reactivated and presently has 14 chapters throughout the Northeastern US

The biggest impact on fraternities and sororities came with laws passed during the Civil Rights Movements. In 1963 the federal government mandated that no academic institution could discriminate against any person as prescribed in the Equal Rights Amendment (Whipple, Baier &

Grady, 1991). A resistance movement headed by prominent businessmen and legislators, many of whom were fraternity alumni, produced Title Nine. This law guaranteed that fraternities and sororities could continue to exist as segregated units, under the condition that they be classified as social organizations and not academic ones (Fraternity advisor, 1993).

Black organizations were also impacted by the large number of economically deprived Blacks now entering higher education (Hackett, 1984). As was the case with white fraternities, Black fraternities came under attack by community Black Civil Rights movement activists who advocated a kind of egalitarian revolutionary black nationalism which called for an end to political and social distinctions in the black community (Hackett, 1985, p. 46).

Similarly, many Latino veterans joined the ranks, and began enrolling in universities all over the Southwest. Additionally, with the increase in efforts by academia to recruit individuals through programs aimed at bringing "minorities" into the academic environment, has come an influx of a variety of Latinos and Latinas from various ethnic cultures. Though Latinos (males) have made some strides in acquiring higher education, and thus middle-class status, Latina women remain among the most poorly educated in this society (Gandara, 1982).

The establishment of the first Latina sorority, Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority, Inc., (LTALS, Inc.) in 1975 reflects the growing presence of Latinas in higher education. Additionally, it reflects the growing sentiments toward retaining or regaining one's ethnic and cultural identity. In searching for Latina sororities over the Internet, I came across the history of Lambda Theta Alpha. The story of their development, though rather superficial, reflects their struggles in society and higher education when they state:

> Our Sisterhood has prospered and aged through the tumultuous 70's and early 80's, seeing many advancements for minorities and women throughout the United States. Never doubting that their dream could become a reality, our Founding Mothers continued on, despite adversity and hindrance from those who despise change.

Currently there are 25 chapters under the umbrella of LTALS, Inc. The growth of such organizations is relatively rapid and can be viewed as a move toward integrating, versus

assimilating, into US mainstream society without losing one's ethnic identity and cultural pride. Mirroring the socioeconomic hierarchy, Latina sorority are the most recent to establish a Greek organization. As the literature has shown, white and Black Greek organizations have been culturally exclusive and, thus, exclusionary organizations. Each developed within their segregated educational communities and have served to maintain the elitist and conservative traditions established between 90 and one hundred years ago. Traditionally, there has been little effort, or desire on the part of white sororities to integrate women from various ethnic/racial groups (Morris, 1991).

Unlike white and Black Greek systems, Latino and Latina Greek organizations have formed as a means of *regaining* and/or *preserving* their ethnic identity. A Latina sorority characteristic that substantiates this claim, is the common practice of transforming Greek letter organization names into Spanish titles or have mixed Spanish and Greek words that reflect cultural, as LTALS, Inc. has done. For example, members of a LTALS, Inc. chapter call themselves "Las Perlas De Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority, Inc." (meaning the perils of ....)

Another findings of interest is that Latina sororities actively work toward recruiting women from different cultural backgrounds. This is made explicit when they state:

> One of the primary concerns of Lambda Theta Alpha has been and continues to be the growth and diversity of its sisterhood . . . As the first Latin sorority in the nation ever to cater towards the needs of minorities and women both, Lambda Theta Alpha recognizes the importance of reaching out to other and forming a united coalition of professional, diverse, culturally and politically aware women. We are not an exclusive group of women and believe that all women alike should be given an opportunity to make their mark on the world. This is our right and our profound legacy. (Internet sorority homepage).

My extensive literature review has not produced any scholarly work addressing the development or cultural practices of Latino and Latina Greek organizations. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not Latina sororities are actually following through on their claims. However, pictures provided over the Internet reflect that some sororities are indeed culturally

diverse groups of women (See Appendix A). Additionally, the case study reported here indicates that many of the claims being made in Latina sorority mission, goal statements, and vision statements are practices and themes that emerged from my data. Another finding of interest that has evolved from a review of the literature that compares Black and white Greek systems, is that Latina sororities have more in common with the development of Black sororities and Fraternities, than with white sororities.

This case study, as well as my on going research with Latina sororities and Latino fraternities, will help to fill the gap in the literature and will provide valuable insights of a growing minority population who have been largely ignored or disregarded in higher education research. The lack of research of this group is astonishing when we consider that "the nation's Hispanic population has grown almost five times faster than non-Hispanic populations in the last ten years," indicating that by the year 2020 they will be the "nation's largest minority group" (Wells, 1989). The implications for this study are many, but one of the most important is that this sorority could provide insights for how culture-specific school-based programs might be developed to assist in the retention of minority students. According to recent studies Culture-specific programs and organizations, such as Boys and Clubs of America, that provide positive role models and the development of pro-social attitudes, self-respect, and a sense of belonging have been proven successful means for the development of a positive self-image that works toward socializing (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993; Sotello Viernes Turner & Tompson, 1993). Hence, such programs might work to not only curb dropout rates, but to prevent many Latino youths from being socialized on the streets by anti-social gangs.

METHODOLOGY

The population studied consisted of eight active sorority members, one alumnus, and two Greek advisors. Each individual was interviewed utilizing a semi-structured interviewing format, and were audio-taped during Spring of 1993. Each interview ran 45 minutes to one hour. The

original interview schedule was first written in English and translated into Spanish by a native Spanish speaker. The questions were then translated back into English by a native English speaker who has a BA in Spanish. Each interviewee was first asked in Spanish as to whether they preferred the interview to be conducted in Spanish or in English. The interviews with the sorority members took place in open areas, usually outside in relatively isolated places, and were face-to-face. The interview with the alumni and founding mother took place over the telephone. One of the nine interviews with Latina members was conducted in Spanish, the rest were done in English. The interviews with the Greek Liaisons were conducted in their offices and both were done in English. When the respondents utilized code-switching, I also code switched from speaking Spanish to English. All audio-taped interviews were transcribed within three days of each interview.

My sampling method was a convenience sample in that I interviewed only member who were willing to be interviewed. I solicited volunteers for interviews during a sorority meeting where 10 members were present. Six of the ten immediately agreed to be interviewed. Two additional members were contacted by telephone and agreed to participate. At the time of the interviews the organization had a total of 43 members. The breakdown of active, inactive, and alumni will not be provided to ensure the anonymity of the women involved in this study.

Twenty hours of observation were spread out over a three week period. Sorority members were sporadically observed during lunch breaks, and during *Cinco de Mayo*[1] celebrations. Extensive field notes were taken and typed up within a week of each event. More recently, I have also collected various written texts off the Internet and from individual sororities that have assisted in my analysis of the interviews and my observations. Additionally, I have conducted an extensive literature reviews of Fraternities and sororities in general, and of Latinos and Latinas in higher education to assist in my analysis.

Data was analyzed via a domain analysis as prescribed by James P. Spradley (1979). In this analysis procedure, Spradley prescribes identifying domains by way of making use of the semantic relationship between native terms. "Because cultural meaning depends on the relationships among symbols, using these relational concepts leads directly to decoding the meaning of these symbols" (p. 107). Thus, my first step after transcribing tapes was to find semantic relationships that ran through the various interviews. Being from the Latina culture, I was able to identify some symbolic themes that relate to cultural values, such as *Respeto* (respect). Respect of oneself and of others is a core value in Latino culture which dictates proper attitudes, ways of speaking, ways of behaving, and ways of simply being. Thus, I searched for examples that would indicate a means to an end by completing the statement "x is a way of showing *respeto* toward others." I also searched for examples that reflected a cause and effect by completing the statement "x is a result of showing *respeto.*" This process was utilized for each of the interviews. Though this clustering of terms that represent "doing" *respeto*, I realized that the majority of examples were more related to traditional gender roles than to concepts of *familia* (family), but were rooted in familial cultural practices. Thus, I developed the domain "Gendered Expectations and the role of familial *respeto.*"

"Preserving Cultural Identity" evolved as another domain that incorporated themes related to such things as the superimposing of Spanish names over Greek organization titles, resistance to Greek culture, inclusionary practices (as it relates to communalism), and observation of cultural holidays. Another domain was "*Familia*", which incorporated themes related to sisterhood, such as love, caring, bonding, and affection, extended family, pledging the sorority, and communalism. A forth domain was titled "Barriers Related to Oppression and Discrimination." This was developed from themes related to institutionalized racism, motherhood, womanhood, Latino machismo, isolation and alienation, and socioeconomic status.

ANALYSIS

Preserving Cultural Identity

The most interesting finding is that these women don't view themselves as being part of the Greek system. When establishing their sororities (or fraternities) most Latinos pick Greek names, symbols, or colors that reflect their organizations culture (Latino Greek Internet homepages). "Previous studies show that pride in group symbols, history, and beliefs (Teske & Nelson, 1973), associational preferences (Rinder, 1959), and self-labeling in ethnic terms (Caditz, 1976; Rothman, 1960) are often included as aspects of identification and identity (Garcia, 1982).

This finding is particularly relevant for explaining the phenomena of Latina and Latino Greek organization naming practices wherein Spanish names are superimposed over Greek names. In this case, this sorority chose a Greek name whose first letter of each word forms an acronym that represents stands for Latina. My Internet searches have revealed some variety in ways Latina sororities (and some fraternities) utilize this technique of symbolic representation. For example, members of Lambda Pi Chi have taken the "L," "P," "C" to create "Latinas Promoviendo Comunidad" (Latina promoting community). Similarly, Sigma Lambda Upsilon has incorporated themselves using the name "Senorities Latinas Unidas Sorority Inc." (United young Latina women). Another form of naming self incorporates both utilizing the work Latina, Latin, or Hispano in the formal name of the organization, as well as the extraction of the letters from formal Greek names. For example, Chi Upsilon Sigma Latin Sorority, Inc., not only utilizes the word Latin in its title, but also takes the "C," "U," "S" and transforms the Greek name to "Corazones Unidos Siempre" (United Hearts Forever). Thus, paradoxically these women disassociate themselves from the traditionally white sororities, while at the same time they are members of the Greek system. Ironically, the practice of superimposing Spanish symbols over traditional Greek names is very similar to the way indigenous peoples of Mexico superimposed their gods and goddesses over Catholic saints.

There resistance to being part of the traditionally white Greek system, has also manifested itself through their participation what might be called an ethnic Greek council. It is a university specific organization made up of representatives from the various ethnic minority fraternities and sororities, which are Black and Latino. Hence, these women acknowledge being "ethnic Greeks" and simply view their participation in the Greek system as a means of keeping their "culture alive" in the "White man's world." One member expressed her views one this subject this way, "it doesn't mean anything really. The only thing that makes us Greek is the letters, and the letters themselves stand for Latina." Additionally, they view themselves as autonomous within the system, and thus out of the reach of Greek domination.

> It doesn't mean too much to me. It's the sisterhood that means a lot to me. We make up our own rules, were not like Panhellenic sororities that say you have to pledge at this time, you gotta cross at this time. We decide what were gonna do, and when.
>
> I don't think that there's anything really wrong with it [being part of the Greek system]. As long as we stick to our ideals and, like, we know where we came from, and like, where we're going, and keep our culture alive through the Greek system (C/21 years old).
>
> I think that in order to complete our goals, we need to be part of these type of organizations, there are many Latinos, Mexicans, who become political because they need to enter the White world to compete and survive. By being in this organization, we're in the White world but yet we're combating the cultural differences).
>
> It's just the letters, we have never learned anything about Greeks. It's a tradition, it doesn't bother me that it's Greek, it doesn't mean anything . . . Mmmm, I don't understand why its Greek or what it means to be Greek.

It is also apparent through their narratives that these women have great pride in their culture, especially as symbolized by their desire to regain and/or preserve their cultural identities through the Spanish language. Many of the women told of how they had not been taught to speak Spanish by their Spanish speaking parents. For these women, getting "back to my roots" and the desire of wanting "to be around people of my culture and learn," has a great deal to do with learning the Spanish language. In explaining why she felt it necessary to "get back to [her] roots," a young women described the pain she felt in not having had the opportunity to experience her culture and get to know her Spanish speaking grandparents better.

> I felt like I missed out on getting to know my grandmother better. I started getting to

> know her better as I started taking Spanish classes and my grandfather I didn't know at all because he passed away before I got to learn enough Spanish. So I really wish they would have taught me more about my culture because I really feel like I've missed a lot of what my culture is about (N).

Coming from an environment where families are accustomed to helping each other out communally, it is logical that these women would "feel proud" when they participate in cultural events such as *Cinco de Mayo* and *Dia de Los Muertos* .[2] The observance of such holidays is at the root of ethnic consciousness which manifests as a sense of cultural pride (Garcia, 1982).

Pride is also expressed in narratives which explain the differences these women see between themselves and traditional "White sororities." Sorority members claim that the biggest difference is that White sororities pick who they want to join, whereas "we don't choose the people, the people choose us." Because many of sorority members claimed to share the concept of getting back to their roots, at first this claim appeared contradictory. So, toward the end of my interviewees I began to ask members if this meant that they would accept Whites into their organization even though they were Latina focused? The answer was yes. One member stated

> We would listen to her ideas but she would have to know that we're Latina, we've always been oppressed and now we're trying to help out our community. We help other communities too. But it's mainly Latino. We do have Anglo and Black members, not here but in other chapters (S/21 years old).

Thus they see themselves as "different" than White sororities in that they do not believe themselves to be elitist, or exclusionary as many traditional White sororities have been stereotyped and confirmed by research to be (Peterson, Altbach, Skinner and Trainor, 1975; Rose & Elton, 1971). All members claim their door is open "to any women who needs help," however they must conform, or at least be willing to accept the established cultural norms of the sorority.

In trying to cognitively process this seemly contradictory practice, it is necessary to understand that this is a form of segregation which is utilized as means of survival by establishing a culturally familiar environment. For this marginalized group of women, it is not seen as discrimination nor segregation to empower themselves by establishing and preserving their cultural identity within their sorority. The intent is to create an atmosphere that will help them "get

through this place." That is to say, a place which can be very hostile, frightening, and alienating for women (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990; Munoz, 1986), particularly for those who have never been away from family. When one of the sorority advisors was asked to comment on the issue of segregation as it pertains to this organizations she said:

> I think it does exist, I don't think it is with hostile intent at all. I think there's no more segregation [among] [ethnic Greeks] then there is [among] some of the Greek honoraria. They just don't have the same purpose, the same function, they weren't created for the same reasons, their goals are totally different. So, I think a lot of it has to do with that more than racial reasons, or that they don't like each other. I don't think they know each other, I don't think they think about it a whole lot. It's probably as much a lack of interaction as it is between the Chess Club and the Student Physics Club, they just don't have a whole lot in common. A lot of your social fraternities and sorority are based more on a social thing. Its a historical, my mom belonged to this and my aunt, and its about who you date and its about partying, and its about a social club. Where as for a lot of the ethnic organizations, a lot more of them are joined for cultural reasons, or as needing an anchor, a support system to get through this place. Some of them for support for academic reasons.

In additional to not seeing themselves as segregationist nor discriminatory, they also do not see themselves as assimilators or *Bendidas*. To be a *Bendida* is to say that one has sold out (culturally) to dominate society, to the "White man's world." Members strongly deny that being Greek means anything other than that they now have a unpolitical way of and keeping the "culture alive through the Greek system." These women seem to gain their strength collectively through interaction with one another.

La Familia

The term sisterhood is a metaphor which goes beyond representing mere friendship. To these women it represents belonging to a complete family unit. The need for support from family is transferred to the sorority. Though one might think that acculturation would lessen familial ties as Latino populations become more independent, research has shown that instead with each new generation "extended family became larger and more integrated" (Griffith & Villavicencio, 85). Additionally, scholars have found that "acculturative stress occurs more frequently when there is greater cultural distance" (Quintana, Vogel, & Ybarra, 1991, p. 164). Thus, the fact that all but one of these young women moved away from home, compounds the phenomena of "culture

shock" associated with attending colleges with low numbers of minorities (Vasques, 1982). My findings indicate that this sorority acts as a buffer against the stresses associated with leaving home and resisting assimilation. Additionally, their affiliation with a campus recognized organization provides these women with a sense that they belong at this university. This is an important finding as research has indicates support from university structures provides students "with a sense of security and well-being that allows the positive expression of their scholarly abilities" (Oliver, Rodriquez, & Mickelson, 1985, p. 12)

One sorority member put it this way when speaking about a sorority sister whose family lives in Mexico:

> One of the girls doesn't have any family here at all, her family is in Mexico and she is here all by herself. We're her family, we're her mother, her father, her sisters and her brothers.

It is not necessary for men to be present to complete the family unit. These women have chosen to take control of their own lives. They have learned that "they don't have to have a man attached to their arm all the time to be of worth, of value" (Sorority advisor, 1993).

Sisterhood is also synonymous with blood sisters, as explained by one member who stated, "We're a support group in the sense that were like sisters, we really try to emphasize that, in the sense of how would you treat your blood sister." To be a part of the "family unit" you must "know how to communicate" and "work out problems." Like true blood sisters, the members are "best friends," who "laugh together" and "work together." Being a sister means you are "really close," "comforting," loving," "sharing," "not being fake," and being "there for each other." The reciprocity of love and working together is inherent in the culture of these women. Griffith and Villavicencio (1985) have reported that as Latinos get more acculturated they ". . . displayed more reciprocal helping than less acculturated Mexican Americans" (p. 88).

One young women told how she became homeless. She was sharing rent with another college student, not a sorority sister, who wasn't able to pay her part of the rent. As a result, both women were evicted. The only recourse she had was to stay with various sorority sisters.

> Finally my sorority sister said, you know what your gonna live with me. We're gonna live in this room together until the end of the school year an then you can find your place when you come back next year (A/20 years old).

What makes this situation so unusual is that the young Latina who took in her sorority sister was already living with three other Latina women in a small apartment. In the Latina culture this is what it means to be communal. It is not viewed as a burden to house, feed or care for family members who are down on their luck. To be family is to be unselfish. One does not turn their backs on family members who need help, even if it means sacrificing self. This unselfishness and willing to help sorority sisters is "being like a family;" a family where people can depend on each other for both emotional and financial support. This was particularly relevant for one young women who claimed:

> Sometimes when I didn't have money, my sisters would give me money to eat, or buy me food or when, when I'm out, if I wanna go out and I, I don't have any money, their like I'll cover you, you know, we'll pay for you, an I can always depend on them (G/21 years old).

An example of strong family ties and one's sense of responsibility to family was provided by a 21 years old respondent. Her parents home is in the Los Angeles Metropolitan area and she has two living brothers and one sister. Both her brothers were involved in gang activity. Another brother was recently killed by a rival gang. Due to her brother's gang affiliations the family was evicted. As a result, the parents came to live with the young women and her Latina sorority sister in a two bedroom apartment. The roommate was planning to move out a month after this interview was conducted, in order to make room for her sorority sister's parents.

Physical expression of affection for one another is another cultural norm valued by members of this sorority. These women express their love for one another in ways that are very culturally based and typical of the traditional Latino family behavior. Parents are usually kissed or hugged when children, even adults, are going to leave the home, be it a short period of time or a long one. A similar ritual takes place upon return, particularly in greeting mothers. Ironically, though these women exhibit these cultural traits of affection, the majority of these women come from homes

where affection was not expressed either verbally or physically. One member put it this way in responding to a question regarding the benefits of being in this sorority:

> It [the sorority] provides me with love that I really didn't feel when I was growing up. A lot of my sisters, when they hug you, you can just feel it, it's like something in your heart . . . my parents never hugged, they never hugged us, they never kissed they never did anything, we weren't an affectionate family.

Thus, one explanation might be that these women are driven to such behavior as a result of a strong desire for an affectionate substitute family. Though this may seem contradictory, it is not. Most Latinas(os) are extremely affectionate people. It is a trait, like the Spanish language, which has been lost by many who have assimilated into main stream society. Thus it is logical that this too would be a cultural trait which these women would seek to regain. I have observed these women interacting throughout the day. It was not surprising for me to see them hugging and/or giving each other a kiss on the check, even when they had just seen each other an hour before. Being a Latina, I am aware of the fact that Latinos, particularly Latinas (Nieves-Squires, 1991) touch more often than not when interacting with each other. Applicable to these findings, Sabogal, Marin, and Otero-Sabogal (1987) claim that "physical closeness has important psychological benefits for relieving stress and expressing warmth/love (Pisano, Wall & Foster, 1986) that may translate into a sense of security and support of the individual."

Being "close knit" means more than just hugging each other when they pass. They are so close knit that they see each other on a daily bases. The majority have lunch together almost every day and spend breaks together. Groups of four to six members study in the college library at least six hours a week. Four members live with sorority sisters, but continuously are together. Those with the same majors often schedule classes together. One reason given for doing so is due to the isolation one feels in being the "only minority in class." This finding is significant as it relates to classroom performance. Studies of communication apprehension have indicated that cultural differences may limit classroom interaction (Olaniran & Roach, 1994). Therefore, it is logical to infer that minority students who feel culturally and racially isolated may also feel more

apprehensive. Thus, they may avoid or reduce participation (McCroskey & Richmond, 1976), give the impression that they are less intelligent by instructors (Olaniran & Roach, 1994), or may be perceived negatively by their peers, than their white classmates who may be comfortable enough to speak up. Additionally, students apprehensiveness and discomfort in classes could influence their dropping out of college (Chesebro, McCroskey, Atwater, Bahrenfuss, Cawelti, Gaudino, & Hodges, 1992; Ericson & Gardner, 1992; McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, & Payne, 1989). This hypothesis is consistent with research of "Hispanic" middle school and junior high students who were classified as "highly communication apprehensive" due to feeling different (Chesbro, et. al., 1989).

On weekends the majority of these students spend hours together either performing community services, fundraising, studying or going to church, movies, or parties together. During vacations and spring break, members who live in the same town said they speak to each other at least once a week. Those who live further away, averaged at least one contact a month. There is one social per summer planned, usually in the Los Angeles area. The following are some of the exceptional accounts that reflect what these women view as being "close knit," and "like a family."

> I go home holidays and we talk on the phone sometimes, but its too expensive. . . I stayed here for half of spring break then went home the rest of the time, like four days. At home I didn't see anybody. I talked to [one of my sisters] everyday 'cause I was worried about her, 'cause she was here by herself. I haven't been away for the summer before because this is my first time in the sorority. I don't know, it's going to be weird being around them all the time then all of a sudden not being around them.

> A lot of us sometimes can't afford to go home for Christmas or Thanksgiving, so we invite each other over for dinner. If we know someone is going to stay here, we just don't leave them alone.

Hence, it appears that some members become accustomed to being away from home and may even begin to value their time with sorority sisters more than the time they spend with their family. This might be explained by the fact that many of these young women come from homes that place heavy emotional and financial demands on them. So much so, that the sorority

becomes a safe haven not only in a hostile school environment, but also from the responsibilities and demands of their socioeconomically deprived families. Research of Chicana undergraduates indicates that personal problems associated with family members is very common stressor for Chicanas in higher education (Munoz, 1986).

Hence, this organization serves as a buffer and support system to overcome the stress associated with personal family problems. Being a common trait, these women actively work toward helping each other during times of emotional turmoil. It is possible to transfer concepts of family to this sorority as the Latino culture is extremely communal. Families are large, and it is not uncommon for families to include extended family members, such as grandmothers, aunts, uncles and/or cousins, in one household. This is especially true for first and second generation US born Latinos(as). Like a true Latino(a) "family unit," this sorority comes complete with a mother image. The advisors for this group appear to serve the function of substitute mothers. They are "motivators," and friends who try to reassure the women that "things will work out." They are described as "caring" and "wonderful people" who are like "our mom's and they care about us and when something happens to us they get worried." So the role of the advisors serves three functions, one to advise academically, the second is to advise on personal matters, and the third is to complete the family unit in the role of mother. Thus advisors serve as guides, friends, and nurturers who work toward assisting in the transition from dependence to independence.

Gendered Expectations and the role of familial respeto

Historically, *respeto* has been central to Latino culture. It is at the core of one's identity and plays a vital role in dictating appropriate behaviors, interactions, and decision making process, particularly for women. Latinos(as), usually fathers, are very strict with their female children. The socialization process of *respeto*, like any other cultural value, begins at a very young age and is influenced by a history of Catholicism (Castillo, 1995). One form of *respeto* specifically instilled in young girls is protection and hold sacred one's virginity and the notion of monogamy

(Baird, 1993; Castillo, 1995; Sabogal, Perez-Stable, Otero-Sabogal, & Hiatt, 1995). This, like the concepts of family, jealousy, and the privilege and responsibility of first born, are cultural values rooted both in Catholicism and the influences of Moorish people who rules over Spain from 700 AD to the mid 1400's. For men, these cultural traits manifest a type of *respeto* that takes the form of machismo, "which is the demonstration of physical and sexual powers [that] is basic to self-respect" (Castillo, p. 66). As a result, woman are often viewed as objects of ownership, who

> was and is always susceptible to being 'conquered' by someone outside the family. For this reason, "good girls," (while they may not wear veils or be covered from head to foot on the street) must not behave so as to elicit aggressive male behavior that would jeopardize family honor, or as more popularly put today: "get them in trouble" (p. 79).

During the interview process, the majority of sorority members stated they come from strict families. To say that one is from a strict family does not limit the imposition of sexual self-respect to that of a father's role. A Latino(a) family member includes uncles, older brothers, and grandfathers who are strict enforces of how a women should behave. In addition, most Latina women, such as aunts, mothers, older sisters, as well as grandmothers, pass on traditional female roles and cultural values that have been imposed on them to their daughters.

> And uhm, (.02) the ideas of my parents are still kind of more traditional . . . My mom's probably the one who's most old fashion, but my Dad is more open mined and I think that's because he went to college an because he deals with teenagers every day, because he's a principle, an so, I think that's why. But yet there is still a lot of things, like the *machismo* is still there. An, you know, I mean my brother, I'm the oldest an I'm a girl an I have a 16 year old bother, an I just see it in the way they, you know, are with him and with me.

The deep rooted ideology of *respeto* associated with sexuality emerged in response to the question "what do you like least about being in a sorority?" Seven of the nine members interviewed indicated that the stigma attached to being a "sorority girls" was what they liked least about being affiliated with the Greek system.

> People look at us and they say, "Oh, yeah, you're a sorority girl." You see we are so different, because if you look at the traditional White fraternities and sororities you see that the ethnic fraternities and sororities are so much different . . . I guess like anybody else would go out, but we are, as far as a sorority we don't throw parties, we don't just, like party all out.

> And, I just, I just, I wish I could change people's view of me being a sorority girl because my sorority is kinda like my family, say like, I'm a family girl.

> People also stereotype you being in a sorority, especially around [here]. . . .It is different if you are an ethnic organization, if you are not Greek, when all it is just a name, its the people who make the organization that matters. The stereotypes you get are "Oh, you're a sorority girl." I really don't feel we're like that, we come from different backgrounds and a lot of us were not raised to go out and party like that, we have a lot of restrictions in our lives, the respect kind of thing.

As sorority women, these Latinas have inherited the stereotypic assumptions about Greek sorority women as "partiers" who "sleep around with men." As noted above, these women see themselves as different in that the foundation of their sorority is strongly tied the cultural value associated with *respeto*. For women of this age, behaving like young ladies includes not engaging in premarital sex and not going out and getting drunk. If a women were to behave this way, they would gain reputations of being "sluts," "loose," or "promiscuous." This would result in loss of self-respect and shame the family.

From the excerpts below, it is evident that these young women choose to disassociate themselves from traditional white sororities because of the conflicts they perceive in cultural values. Thus, it is apparent that racism on the part of traditional white Greek organizations is not the only factor for the homogeneity of such organizations. It is likely that Latina women, and possibly Latino men, choose to exclude themselves due to preconceived notions about what it means to be a women in a white sorority, which is compounded by the cultural value of *respeto*.

> They (White sorority members) like to party and stuff, we party but we dance and don't get drunk or anything (S/20 years old).

> I didn't feel comfortable with the norms of women on campus. A lot of it had to do with cultural differences, sexuality was an issue, I felt like I couldn't relate because I wasn't sexually active (J/25).

> But what I had heard was that it was a lot of "Wedas" (White women) partying . . . I had heard from my grandma or somebody, uhm, that oh, you know, all's they do is party and sleep around an that's not for you, you know, cause I come from a strict family (A/20).

> Here you lead your life, but some people can get out of hand with that. They don't know when to stop and get control of their lives. But I feel like I was okay because my parents really taught me right from wrong . . . My dad was a very strict enforcer of respect and we got punished.

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Three sorority members also discussed their fears related to attending fraternity parties associated with rumors and stereotypes of fraternity men sexually exploiting young women. In the following narrative, one young women talked about why she does not attend fraternity parties.

> I never go to men's fraternity houses, huh, *white*, you know, fraternity houses' parties. Because they get away with a lot of things. Sometimes, you know, there'll be girls that get raped in those houses. I have an ex-boyfriend, that's a cop. He said that one of the fraternity houses down there [points down the street]. That uhm, . . . one girl, she was drunk and passed out and their were these guys lined up in the room just, you know, having sex with her and doing their thing, whatever. And one guy flipped her over and was doing his thing and this other guy started to flip her over to see who she was, and he realized he had just done it with his sister . . . He found out it was his sister and he went crazy. He took her to the hospital, she didn't wake up for two days, didn't even know what had happened to her. Those guys will probably get off because they're like sworn to, you know, what they call the honor code or something like that.

Though this women's fears are based on hear-say information, research of traditional white Greek fraternities indicates a history of fraternity men being more likely "to be sexual offenders (Garrett-Gooding & Senter, 1987; Kirkpatrick & Kanin (1957) and sorority women somewhat more likely to be victimized (Kirkpatrick & Kanin, 1957)" (Kalof & Cargill, 1991). Other studies report that "sexual assault is common among sorority women" (Rivera & Regoli, 1987, p. 40), and "that fraternities represent a social context that tolerates, if not actually encourages, sexual coercion of women, including sorority women" (Copenhaver & Grauerholz, 1991). In line with these findings, Martin & Hummer, 1989 claim that "fraternities are a physical and sociocultural context that encourages the sexual coercion of women" 458). Similarly, in a more recent study, Stombler (1994) found that the consequences of being a "little sister"[3] "are the sexual objectification, exploitation, and abuse of little sisters" (p. 289), wherein "sexual exploitation seems natural to most little sisters" (p. 317).

Thus, it appears that the fears expressed by these Latina sorority women are indeed warranted. Interestingly, her comment that "those guys will probably get" is substantiated by Martin and Hummer who found "[b]rotherhood norms require 'sticking together' regardless of

right or wrong; thus rape episodes are unlikely to be stopped or reported to outsiders, even when witnesses disapprove" (1989, p. 469). So, it seems that self-*respeto* serves as a guide to making safe choices that do not "get them in trouble," as it plays an important role in shaping the behavior of these Latina women and in their choice to participate in this sorority. There need to not only feel that they are respected by their peers and family, but also respected and valued as human beings drives their need to maintain this gender role expectation.

The notions of *respeto* is so embedded as a cultural value that it is actually part of the initiation process, as indicated by one women who said:

> When I pledged, the procedures that we go through, they teach us about one another, they teach us how to work together and they teach us how to respect one another.

The significance of respeto in this sorority should not be taken lightly. In the Latino culture, to possess *respeto* for oneself is all encompassing of the way one views self and how one interacts with others. It means one must accept and deal with conflict that arises from individual problems and differences between self and others. It also means that as sorority sisters one must learn to compromise. *Respeto* allows for one to work out differences in a orderly and tactful manner, without humiliating or putting down another. To humiliate self or another is equivalent to the Japanese notions of "losing face." It seems that in this sorority culture, differences do not serve to divide, instead they serve as a means for growth and a way of reinforcing the bonding process during and after initiation, thus strengthening group identification, as well as traditional gender expectations associated with sexuality.

In sum, being part of this sorority provides its members with a sense of belonging and protects them from an environment, and possibly value systems, that may be viewed as hostile and/or contradictory to their cultural gendered norms. The sorority is like a sanctuary, and a place where self-respect fosters a sense of family and safety from the advances and exploitation of men. Sorority members have deep pride in who they are culturally and what they are able to accomplish through this Latina sorority. Their common interests in preserving the cultural value

of *respeto* serves to reinforce communal identification, as well as traditional gender values.

Oppression and discrimination

The Latina sorority is also a safe haven where one grows and receives support to achieve a goal. That goal is completing their education in the most non-threatening environment possible. Generally speaking, in the traditional Latino community, young women are not expected to receive a college education. Instead they are is expected to mature and marry. This cultural belief is also embedded in the ideology of *respeto* as described above. Education is for the men who traditionally support the wife who give birth to their children and who care for the home. Thus, traditional value systems work toward keeping women from gaining education or entering the workforce. Those this is the case for most Mexican families, Latinas in the US are recognizing the benefits of acquiring higher education. They realize that independence is rooted in economic security, a factor for success that is echoed in a study by Desdemona Cardoza, (1991). Additionally, even those who maintain and foster traditional Latino gender roles, realize the growing need of a second family income. Moreover, because many of these women come from a lower socioeconomic class, they view education not only as a means of escaping the impoverished life styles of their parents, but also as a means toward assisting their parents in their struggles to survive.

Through this sorority, these women are taking control of their own lives. They are empowering themselves in what they view as a hostile environment. They are pioneers, "history makers" like their 1970's counterparts the Chicana Feminista. Their goals are to achieve their education with or without parental support and in spite of any discrimination they might encounter. They are hardworking and take pride in who they are and what they are working to accomplish. There strong desire to survive and overcome obstacles where expressed through their shared world views and experiences. Through the interviews it is clear that most of these have many commonalties as they "basically come from the same background so we can

understand what we're all going through, we relate."

One common barrier experienced by most of the women dealt with a lack of support for their choice to attend college. Considering that Latina women traditionally are not allowed to leave home before marrying, it is interesting to note that all of these women, except one, left home to attend college. Of these first generation college students, all claimed that they experienced resistance to attending college and/or indifference by immediate family and/or extended family for one or both of the following reasons: one, because Latinas going to college is itself an act which runs counter to traditional Latino culture/gender roles; and, two, because their families are economically unstable and needed the financial support of these young women.

> Dad went up to like third grade and mom up to first. At the beginning they didn't want me to come to college. They didn't *allow* me to, as they put it, cause I needed to help them, and you know, who's gonna provide the other part of the income for the household

> I don't think that they thought I could make it either, not because I couldn't make it, but because that's the way they thought that it was for the Latina . . . my dad (went to) high school and my mom junior high, I'm first generation college

> I'm the only one going to college from my generation, from all my cousins and stuff, none of them are in college . . . I get a lot of support from my parents, but my grandparents, uncles and aunts know that I'm struggling financially and they say well why don't you just drop out of school and get a job?

> Being a women is very hard, they don't want you to go to college because your a women. It's easier to forge a bond [with her sorority sisters] than with someone that doesn't come from the same background.

> My mother works cleaning rooms and my father is unemployed right now, but he is looking, they work very hard . . . It was difficult telling them that I was leaving home, but, well, my cousin helped me because, well, they know that if I have a career I can help them later.[4]

> My mother didn't want me ta go ta college, . . . she was like, Ay mi hija, your never gonna get a husband, no one's gonna want ta marry you for education, you need ta learn how to cook and clean or your never gonna have a husband.

> My mom always told me she wanted me to do what she had dreamed of . . . she told me not to get married but to finish school . . . My dad said you have to work. I said "no quero trababjar (I don't want to work), I'm only 17. I'm going to work for the rest of my life. There [in Mexico] everyone got married really young, and I had a boyfriend . . . The only way to break up with him is if I leave, if I stay and work, in a year or two he's going to want to get married, and I don't want that. So at first my dad said 'no, vas a estar sola' (no your going to be [living] alone) . . . I lived with my aunt for the first year.

Interestingly, these statements, as well as previous research (Chacon, Cohen, & Strover,

1986; Nieves-Squires, 1991), contradict the 1985 US Bureau of the Census report that claimed "Hispanic" American parents express high aspirations for college attendance of their daughters (McKenna & Ortiz, 1988). This contradiction might be explained by intergroup differences among those classified as "Hispanic." Generally speaking, those who identify as being of "Hispanic" ancestry are usually of middle-class Mexican decent. Additionally, they tend to usually identify more with their Spanish roots versus their indigenous roots. Studies have shown that more acculturated educated Latinos tend to take on more middle-class values then those who do not acculturate. The young women in this study are all from the lower socioeconomic class, and are of Mexican decent. None identified themselves as being of "Hispanic" origin. Typically, the US Bureau of the Census has lumped all ethnic groups of Spanish ancestry, whether or not they are of American Indian ancestry, under the label "Hispanic." Thus, both ethnic and/or class might be factors for the discrepancies reported here.

Whatever the reasons, the excerpts above reveal a dedication and desire for higher education that runs counter to family needs and desires. For these women, sharing their experiences and supporting each have served to reinforce the ties that bind them in their goal to achieve higher education which include, but are not limited to, escaping oppressive circumstances, such as poverty, or dysfunctional family circumstances, and/or a desire for a profitable career. It is interesting to note that six of the nine active member interviewees reported sending money home to help support the family. According to a study conducted by Daniel G. Munoz, the practice of Latinas in higher education sending money home to help support immediate family members has changed little since 1986.

Many of the women expressed that they would not have been able to continue their education without the sorority.

> I think that in order to complete my endeavors I needed to be part of this type of organization. There are many Latinos and Mexicans who become political, they need to enter this world to compete.

> I had money problems, and I wasn't able ta have stable housing, like a lot of obstacles because, like, I've been homeless, like, for a little while and I was staying with my sorority sisters, which is good, because if I didn't have a sorority, I wouldn't have no where ta stay, I'd have ta go home.
>
> If it wasn't for the sorority, I don't think I would still be here because they have basically guided me through all my experiences here at college.
>
> There emphasis is academic, I don't really get a lot of support from my family because they never like went to college or anything so they don't know what it's like to get like academic support.

Other than barriers associated with finances and traditional gender roles, many of the women expressed experiencing some degree of discrimination before and/or while at the predominantly white college they were attending, including discrimination from traditionally White Greek sorority members. Additionally, tension resulted from institutionalized racism that manifests itself in classrooms wherein women find that they are the minority in the classroom. Hence, the sorority again serves as a sanctuary and as a source of strength from which to "combat the difference" and work toward achieving their educational goals.

> We are all minority, we're all going through the same kind of thing right now, socially, we're discriminated against . . . we share similar backgrounds and we support each other.
>
> When we're around other organizations I don't feel comfortable because they don't look at us as being Greek. Because they have this idea that Mexicans aren't supposed to be in the Greek system, I heard that from a member of a White organization.
>
> I bonded with women that had the same problems with assimilation . . . by being in this organization we are in the White world but we're combating the differences.

It is interesting to note that much of the discrimination from members of "mainstream" society served as motivation or reinforcement to seek higher education and/or work harder to "make a sorority" for at least two members. For example, one young women told the story about an experience she had in high school where one of her two White friends decided to write future life stories for all three of them.

The story for one of her friends indicated that she would be a happily married and successful writer. For the girl who was doing the writing, she envisioned herself traveling around the world and eventually meeting the man of her dreams.

> Her story for me was that I would somehow end up in the city, in the ghetto, married to a

> Black man who was a drug dealer and would have about 10 kids, that was my future.

This is not an unusual scenario that is expressed by Whites about Latinas and other people of color, in fact it is typical and the media often reinforces these stereotypic preconceived notions about women of color. This experience is what this young woman said motivated her to pursue higher education.

However, it must be noted that discrimination and oppression is not only experienced through encounters with members of "mainstream" society but also from within one's own cultural. For example, two of the young women interviewed claimed to have been "teased" and/or rejected by people of their own culture due to *looking* white.

> When I was growing up I got teased a lot because my family is dark . . . So, it's like, I've been teased, you know, a lot, 'Oh yea, she's Weda (Anglo) and . . . your jus a White girl' and I'm like, 'no, no, no, I'm not, in my heart I'm Mexican (A)

> I look White so I never had a problem with discrimination and stuff like that, I mean not being accepted by whites and stuff. So it was kinda like the other way around, they were like all, your White, I'm like all, I know I look White but I'm really a Mexican, I know my last name isn't Mexican but I really am I wanted to learn more about my culture and to be around people of my culture and learn" (G).

This phenomena of those who have been oppressed internalizing oppression and becoming the oppressors is best explained through Paulo Freire's (1970) philosophy of oppression. Through studies with peasants in Latin America, Freire explored issues associated with the struggles of humans to achieve freedom from oppression. In short, Freire found that the oppressed internalize oppressive behavior and the hegemonic ideology that serves to maintain the oppressive conditions in which they live. As a result, they end up taking on the persona of those who have oppressed them. It becomes their model of humanity that creates a condition where people can't easily see what they themselves have become.

In sum, this sorority serves as a sanctuary wherein the Latina members are shielded from hostile external forces, including those who view them as inferior. Has been shown, these women have much in common that serves to strength the communal and cultural ties that bind. It is place where they can actively work in unison toward achieving their goals of cultural preservation.

academic and career advancement, and maintain a strong sense of self. As Vasques (1982) points out, it is particularly important that "[F]irst generation Chicana college students . . . inoculate themselves against the crippling effects of being a "triple minority" by establishing a sense of pride in their origins, history, and group identity as well as in their abilities" (p. 159).

CONCLUSION:

Higher education has traditionally not been conducive to any group of people other than the 18 to 25 year old White male. Due to cultural commonalties, it is evident that white females have been able to fit into the academic environment with greater ease than members of most minority groups, despite the sexism they often continue to encounter. With the Civil Rights Movement and forced desegregation came academic programs and services to help meet the needs of women such as these Latina students. However, such programs were geared to meeting only academic needs, not cultural ones.

Resistance to assimilation has been very strong since the Chicano Movement. Though some scholars argue that "acculturation is a cure-all and that identification with one's culture is damaging . . . A more appropriate philosophy--that of cultural democracy--maintains that identification with one's ethnic group is, in fact, a necessary ingredient of academic success and psychological adjustment . . . (Henderson & Merritt, 1968; Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974; Cordova, Note 4; Ramirez, Castaneda, & Cox, Note 5)" (Vasquez, 1982). This sorority supports the claim that maintenance of one's ethnic identification is contributing to the academic success of Latina women. In a recent informal discussion with the current president of this organization, I was told that five of the eight active members I interviewed are still in college, the other three have graduated.

Additionally, though some feminist would argue that cultural values as *respeto* are rooted sexism or oppressive values systems, they nonetheless play a crucial role it the survival of these women. As indicated earlier, *respeto* is at the core of Latino culture, including the concept of

family which serves to bond these women as being like "blood sisters." What is evident, is that cultural identity encompasses all of what is culturally known as familism. "Familism is described as including a strong identification and attachment of individuals with their families (nuclear and extended), and strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among members of the same family (Triandis, Marin, Betancourt, Lisansky & Chang, 1982)" (Sabogal & Marin, 1987). Thus, "being like family" means that whether or not sorority members drop out of school or graduate, "once a sorority member, always a sorority member, for life."

Though the interpretations and observations extracted from this study can not and should not be generalized to all Latina sororities, preliminary research of the literature and Internet data being generated by Latina sororities reveals that Latina sororities, generally speaking, have much in common. Moreover, my research has indicated that though Latina sorority members join sororities for some of the same reasons given by white women who join traditional white sororities, their indeed more differences than there are commonalties. Furthermore the concept of sisterhood for Latina women is rooted in an articulation of shared oppression based on both gender and racial oppression. On the other hand, white sororal sisterhood "is not rooted in an articulation of shared oppression based on gender" or race (Handler, 1995).

In brief, though most white sororities originally formed to ensure "academic achievement for the advancement of women," research indicates that white women emphasis joining Greek systems for political and social reasons (Peterson, Altbach, Skinner, & Trainor, 1975; Rose & Elton, 1971), more often than they emphasis joining for academic support. More recent studies indicated that political reasons are no longer significant factors for joining white sororities, particularly for "little sisters" who claim to join Greek systems for "social reason--to meet men, make friends, attend parties and other social activities, feel like a member of a 'family,' connect to campus life, and have fun" (Stombler, 1994, p. 289). In reading this last statement by Stombler, superficially, it seems that Latina sororities and white sororities have much in common.

However, as this study has shown, cultural differences in value systems and practices reveal very different conceptual meanings of "family," "friendship," and "connecting to campus life."

The emphasis some white sorority women place on meeting men, attending parties, and other activities might be explained by Lottes and Kuriloff's (1994) research which indicates that "sorority membership contributes to more permissive peer socialization in college than nonsorority membership This more permissive socialization may result from their frequent association with fraternity men" (p. 214). Though Latina sorority women say they do date, those who do are tend to date the same individual over time. Moreover, they tend to prefer to attend parties and other social events with each other versus with dates. None of these women had steady boyfriends at the time of the interviews.

Furthermore, this organization is unlike white sororities in that they are actively seeking diverse membership. A recent informal discussion with the current president revealed that this sorority now has over 55 members, with a few being from different ethic backgrounds. In traditional white sororities, homogeneity is maintained through both institutionalized racist practices such as rush, as well as alumni who recommend potential members from their communities and networks (Risman, 1982), and who historically only recommend traditional white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants (Peterson, Altbach, Skinner, & Trainor, 1976; Lord, 1987). Thus, it is not surprising that this Latina sororities, like those I found over the Internet, do not participate in traditional rush. The ritual for soliciting new members encompasses having what they call "tea parties" were interest groups are formed. Women get to know potential new members over a three week period that held during Spring semester versus the Fall rush. These women indicated that they did not participate in rush because they view it as being "bad for your self-esteem." A relatively recent study found that rush does indeed effect student's self-images (Keller & Hart, 1971) and was a factor that contributed to some white women dropping out of school (Rose & Elton, 1971).

In light of these findings, it is relatively easy to conceptualize why the Latina Sororities formed in the first place. Additionally, with the insights regarding the discrimination and sexism associated with being Latinas and women, one can also relatively easily conceptualize why such development took so long. With the growing number of Latina women entering college systems, one can imagine that Latina sororities will continue to provided a refuge in often foreign and hostile environments. Before discrimination and inequality can be eliminated in colleges and universities, students must become more heterogeneous. Blau (1977) argues, "when heterogeneity is very high, the barriers to interaction fall as it becomes more difficult to avoid interaction among groups" (Mentzer, 1993). Thus, until colleges become more heterogeneous organizations such as this can play a significant role to elevate stressors associated with racism, isolation, and alienation. This may prove to be particularly important in California where anti-immigration sentiments and laws, such as Proposition 209, are drastically impacting minority recruitment programs in public college and university systems.

This study indicates that the value place on family and extended family has not yet been totally abandoned by the Americanized Latino culture. This cultural characteristic is reinforced by and even more prevalent in families that are part of the most recent waves of Latin American immigrants. This concept has been carried over into the academic world through the establishment such organizations like this sorority. Moreover, this study also reveals that college bound Latina women are resisting traditional gender roles, which is having a negative impact on their relationships with family members. Studies have shown that family support is critically important to educationally ambitious Latina women (Gandara, 1982; Vasquez, 1982)

Additionally, these women are becoming more independent of parental control, more assertive in making decisions, and more confident in their choice to attend college. In this environment, they are

> safe to be assertive, to show how smart you are. Your father, your brother aren't here threatening you. In the sorority there's no gender roles. In the sense of you're here to wait on

> people. One woman, her mother blatantly told her, if you go into this field no one will want to marry you. Now I know, because we talked about it, she's been very direct with her family, and I'm sure that sometimes they just cringe. But in our organization no one thinks she's weird because she's in a technical field. No one makes fun of her. We think it's great. We think she's made it. In some ways I think its liberating. They're free to be who they are, whatever it may be, they're not playing those roles in the family. So they can be there for each other (Sorority advisor, 1993).

Paradoxically, though these women have a strong need regain and/or preserve their individuality, their independence, and their cultural identity, they are at the same time resisting traditional gender roles of motherhood and subservient wife. This internal battle to maintain cultural ties while at the same time resisting aspects of expected gender roles add to the stress that comes from entering a new and often hostile environment (Vasquez, 1982). Studies have revealed that role changes among Latina women are accompanied by high stress levels (Chacon, Cohen, Camarena, Gonzales, & Strover, 1982; Padilla & Lindholm, 1984; Vasques, 1982; Zambrana, 1982). Their need to regain, alter, reinforce, and rediscover certain aspects of their cultural roots and self-identity are as clear in their actions as they are in their words. Providing community service in the Latino(a) community is very important to these women. Though they do provide non-Latino community service there "emphasis is on the Latino community."

The most significant commonalties and at time barriers to achieving their educational goals include issues related to family, socioeconomic backgrounds, and feelings of alienation and discrimination from family, extended family, perceived friends, and the college environment. This sorority fulfills needs not provided by one's family and the academic world and helps students to empower themselves. The notion of this sorority being empowering runs counter to that of "little sister" organizations that have been found to "encourage dependence and powerlessness in women" (Stombler & Martin, 1994).

Though it may not yet be recognized, this Latina sororities may some day also be a valuable networking system that will assist Latinas entering the workforce. According to the current president, the organization has been steadily growing and networking between chapters has

proven beneficial in that chapters have joined forces to fight proposition 209. However, proposition 209 was successful in abolishing affirmative action in California. Nevertheless, the women were empowered and did act unison in attempting to combat what they perceived to be a threatening proposition.

As to future research, I plan to return for follow-up interviews with members of this sorority. Additionally, I am currently in the process of interviewing members from a different sorority located at a different Northwestern US university. My goal is to continue to explore how this culture-specific school-based program influences the acquisition of a college degree. Additionally, I'm am interested in exploring how this organization might be used as a model for developing programs that might assist minorities in both public and private grade schools. This is particularly important as "[t]he rate of retention of Hispanic Americans in elementary and secondary schools is the lowest for any population group" (McKenna & Ortiz, 1988).

Studies focusing on comparative analysis of the cultural norms and values that exist between and among Latinas and Latinos Greek organizations are also needed in order to better understand the impact higher education is having on Latina(o) cultural norms. Studies among and between various Latina(o) cultural groups are also warranted as a means for avoiding fostering stereotypes of Latinas as being culturally homogenous. Typically, people "do not differentiate among the various Hispanic groups but have one stereotype for all" (Nieves-Squires, 1991), hence, it is important for researches to approach the different groups keeping in mind that cultural practices may vary according to ethnic identity and class distinctions. However, one should also be aware that as individuals within groups move upward in social class, they may become more homogenous (Zeff, 1982).

Additionally, studies are needed to refute or substantiate my findings in order know how generalizable my findings are. Other studies of significance might incorporate ethnographic comparative studies of White sororities, Black sororities, and Latina sororities in order ascertain

what gender specific differences exist. Moreover, such studies might provide insights as to the degree that this organizations might serve as retention mechanisms. And finally, studies are needed that will ascertain what impact, if any, the altering of cultural norms is having on Latinas when they re-enter there previous social environments.

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1 *Cinco de Mayo* is a holiday in observance of the victory over the French by Mexico on May 5, 1862.

2 "Day of the Dead," is on November 2. It is a day for paying one's respect to the dead. There is an elaborate ritual that includes cleansing of headstones, putting out food, making alters, and visiting with family and friends. This traditional cultural practices is primarily rooted in our indigenous culture.

3 "Fraternity little sisters, sometimes called 'sweethearts,' are undergraduate women affiliated with a men's social fraternity; they typically serve the fraternity in a 'hostess' or 'booster' capacity. Fraternity men select women to be little sisters on the basis of beauty and sociability, following a rush process modeled after fraternity men's rush. Rushees attend parties or interest meetings for several days and, if selected, go through a pledge period and are subsequently initiated as quasi-members of the fraternity (Stombler and Martin, 1994)" (Stombler, 1994, p. 297).

4 This interviewee responded in Spanish, the following his her untranslated response. Mi mama trabaja limpiando cuartos y mi papa orita no tiene trabajo, pero esta buscando, como trabajan muy dudo . . . estaba muy deficil decidles que me iba venir fuera de las casa, perro este, pues, me prima me hayudo porque, pues, ellos saben que si yo tengo una carrera les pudo ayudales despues.

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Lambda Theta Alpha's Future Endeavors

As the plight of the woman and minorities change entering the 21st century, so will we change and grow as we cater towards their needs. However, we will never compromise the principles set forth by our Founding Mothers. Their legacy continues on as we struggle for equality on every level. Every new sister has something different to contribute to Lambda Theta Alpha and something different to take with her on her life-long journey.

Each year we look to new faces and new schools to help women eveywhere and add to the diversity of our Sisterhood. Lambda Theta Alpha, Latin Sorority, Inc. lives on, growing from the new.

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